

## **THE WEeping PROPHEt**

### ***Jeremiah 11:18-20; 12:5-6***

#### **INTRODUCTION**

- A. The Rise of Asceticism.
  - 1. In 5<sup>th</sup> century Syria, asceticism was all the rage. The more one could deny the body, abuse the body, mortify the body, the more holy one could claim to be.
    - a. It was during this period that the monastic movement became popular.
    - b. Throughout, there was great emphasis on personal sacrifice and suffering.
- B. St. Symeon, the Stylite.
  - 1. The career of Symeon.
    - a. Admitted to a monastery at the age of 13.
    - b. He ate only once a week (Sundays). Fasted 40 days during Lent for 26 straight years.
    - c. He was dismissed from the monastery for almost killing himself with his self-abasements. Even his fellow ascetics thought he went too far.
  - 2. The “Pillar” period.
    - a. He built and lived on four different pillars – each successively higher and, presumably, closer to heaven: 9, 18, 33, and 60 ft.
    - b. The platform at the top of the pillar measured a mere 3 feet in diameter. He could never lie down, barely sit, and mainly stand on the perch.
    - c. Food was carried to him by disciples.
    - d. But Symeon lived on top of these pillars for 36 years until his death.
- C. What, perhaps, is most striking about this behavior, is not so much about the man, but the reaction of the masses. They thought him a most holy saint. And so it has always been. The more strange and weird some people’s behavior becomes, the more likely it is that other people will blame it on holiness, saintliness, and living close to God.

#### **I. THE LIFE AND TIMES OF JEREMIAH.**

- A. Tumultuous Times in Israel’s History.
  - 1. Judah was in the final stages of her national suicide. Israel to the north had self-destructed 100 years before.
    - a. Religious apostasy was absolute. God’s law had been lost.
    - b. Five different kings ruled Judah during Jeremiah’s adulthood.
  - 2. The International Scene.
    - a. Assyria was no longer a threat – it had been destroyed at the Battle of Carchemish in 605 B.C. by the Babylonians, Medes and Persians.
    - b. Babylon was the major threat to the region.
      - i. 605 B.C. – Nebuchadnezzar besieged Jerusalem, and deported the leading citizens (among them Daniel and his colleagues).
      - ii. 597 B.C. – Jerusalem was attacked again by Babylon when Jehoiakin rebelled (8 yrs.).
      - iii. 586 B.C. – Jerusalem was finally destroyed (11 yrs.).
- B. The Career of Jeremiah.
  - 1. Called in the 13<sup>th</sup> year of Josiah’s reign – 626 B.C.
  - 2. Prophesied through the reigns of Josiah, Jehoahaz, Jehoiakim, Jehoiachin, and Zedekiah.
  - 3. He was a contemporary of Ezekiel, Daniel, and Habakkuk.
  - 4. Lived through the siege, defeat, and destruction of Jerusalem.

5. Eventually, Jeremiah went with the survivors of this calamity to Egypt, where – tradition tells us – he was stoned to death.

## **II. OBSERVATIONS ON JEREMIAH.**

### **A. Jeremiah Was Strange.**

1. He was a mystic.
  - a. A man of dreams and visions – almond blossoms and boiling pots, ch. 1.
  - b. A man who loved object lessons:
    - i. The clay jar – he called a meeting of the elders of the people and broke a jar before them to drive home his prophecies, 19:1-13.
    - ii. The yoke – (Jer. 27:1-2). He wore a yoke around for weeks to visually demonstrate what Judah could expect of the future.
  - c. Jeremiah was a man who constantly heard the voice of God.
2. He was a doomsayer.
  - a. It is not for nothing that Jeremiah is called “The Weeping Prophet.”
    - i. Jeremiah 6:10-11a; 15:1-3; 25:15-17, 27-28; 34:17-20
  - b. His message was defeatist – “Surrender!” Jer. 29
    - i. “Don’t fight the Babylonians. They are God’s instrument for punishment. Give up. Capitulate. Submit.”
    - ii. “We are going into exile. And when we do, build houses, marry, have children. You’re going to be there for a long time.”
  - c. He spoke this message constantly.
    - i. He had no pulpit, no service times, no worship agenda. But still he managed to preach this message wherever he could gather an audience.
    - ii. He preached in the Temple, at the city gates, in the Palace of the king.
    - iii. Whether before kings or the people or even the enemy, the content of his message remained the same.
3. And there is no question – Jeremiah must have come off as bizarre.
  - a. Jer. 16:1-9. God required certain things of his prophet that must have made him seem abnormal to the people around him.
  - b. No family (vs. 1-4), no funerals (vs. 5-7), and no parties (vs. 8-9).

### **B. As Expected, Jeremiah Suffered.**

1. He had few friends.
  - a. Those who claimed to be his friends were hoping he was just crazy, that his prophecies were fevered imaginings of an unbalanced mind. They hoped he was wrong, Jer. 20:7, 10.
  - b. Even his kinsfolk plotted to kill him, 12:6.
2. It is no surprise that Jeremiah had many enemies.
  - a. Jer. 20:1-2, 7-10; 26:7-11; 37:11-16; 38:1-6.
3. Many of the tears the “weeping prophet” shed were for his own pitiful condition.

## **III. SOMETIMES, GOD USES STRANGE INSTRUMENTS TO ACCOMPLISH HIS WILL.**

### **A. Jeremiah Spoke the Truth.**

1. His strangeness, his suffering was not the result of psychopathology or twisted personality.
  - a. It wasn’t that Jeremiah was just a gloom and doom kind of fellow.
  - b. His message did not spring from depression or personal misery.
2. The content of Jeremiah’s preaching was rooted in his commitment to truth.

- a. There were days he did not want to speak the message God had given him to proclaim.
  - b. But Jeremiah was convinced that his people's only hope was to hear the word of God and respond to it with mourning and repentance.
- B. The Fact is That the Truth is Often Hard to Hear.
  - 1. There were many others who did not share Jeremiah's reverence for truth.
    - a. Jer. 23:16-18, 21-22, 25-32
    - b. Most of us would rather hear pleasant words.
    - c. Few false prophets suffered as Jeremiah did when they went about saying, "Peace. Peace." 6:14; 8:11
    - d. Yet it was the prophets with pleasant words who were responsible for the great suffering which would follow in the years ahead.
  - 2. For Jeremiah, truth – and the good of the people – outweighed his personal sacrifice and suffering.

## CLOSING

- A. You Can't Always Judge a Book By its Cover.
  - 1. Just because someone climbs up on a pole and subjects himself to horrible suffering does not necessarily mean he is holy or lives closer to God.
  - 2. But sometimes the truest words we will ever hear will come from the strangest messengers.
  - 3. Being a Christian today does not mean we have to be strange or weird or wear funny clothes or speak in 16<sup>th</sup> century English. There are times however, when Christians are called upon to stand against their culture and tell the truth – even if it means that we look a little bizarre in doing so.
- B. Three Great Roadblocks to Christian Witness Today.
  - 1. Our aversion to strangeness. We don't want to be seen as different.
    - a. A peculiar people [KJV], Titus 2:14.
  - 2. Our fear of suffering. We don't want to be persecuted.
    - a. Matthew 5:10
    - b. 2 Timothy 3:12
  - 3. Our restraint to tell the painful truth, 2 Timothy 4:2-4.
- C. Hebrews 11:32-38a
- D. Jer. 12:5, *"If you have run with footmen and they have tired you out, then how can you compete with horses?"*